

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

CURRICULUM GRADES 5-7

TEACHER: LESSON 3

THEME: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VOTE

This is a project that could be completed by students from grades 5-7. A number of ideas and activities are presented in five lessons to form one complete civics curriculum. Individual teachers are free to add, subtract, or edit as they wish, depending on their interests, time constraints, and local conditions.

ACTIVITY:

Ask groups to discuss cause and effect relationships of voting or not voting. (See Student Lesson Three) For example, if the majority of people don't vote, what is the likely impact on:

- A. the democratic ideals of the U.S. Government?
- B. the way we make, apply and enforce laws?
- C. what our government does?
- D. guaranteeing the rights of all citizens?
- E. what it means to be a "good citizen?"

Print the following worksheets for each group. Include the questions after the benchmarks.

Group I

Benchmark:

- A. Identify key democratic ideals of U.S. Government.
- B. Identify the traits of responsible citizenship and explain how they contribute to the democratic ideal.

Continually ask yourself the following questions:

- A. "What role does voting play here?"
- B. "What does voting have to do with democratic ideals and responsible citizenship?"
- C. "How can you use this information to get more people to vote?"

Group II

Benchmark:

- A. Identify the people and entities who make, apply, and enforce rules and laws.

Continually ask yourself the following questions:

- A. "What role does voting play here?"
- B. "What does voting have to do with rules and laws and with those who make, apply and enforce them?"
- C. "How can you use this information to get more people to vote?"

Teacher Note: Possible discussion topics.

- A. Why do we have rules and laws?
- B. What would happen if we didn't have any?
- C. Who decides such things as speed limits, or who can buy tobacco, or who is required to attend school, or who must take the WASL? (These decisions are all the result of someone's voting.)

Group III

Benchmark:

- A. Explain what government is and what governments do.
- B. Understand that different societies have different forms of government.

Continually ask yourself the following questions:

- A. "What role does voting play here?"
- B. "How does voting differ from government to government and from society to society?"
- C. "How can you use this information to get more people to vote?"

Teacher Note: Possible discussion topics.

- A. What would happen if we had no elections?
- B. How would government do its job?
- C. How do governments operate in countries that don't have elections?

Group IV

Benchmark:

- A. Identify individual rights and the responsibilities they imply and the importance of respecting the rights of others.
- B. Participate in civic discussion pertaining to public issues at school and in the local community.

Continually ask yourself the following questions:

- A. "What role does voting play here?"
- B. "What does it mean when we say that voting is both a right and a responsibility?"
- C. "How does voting affect what happens to schools and communities?"
- D. "How can you use this information to get more people to vote?"

Teacher Note: Possible discussion topics.

- A. What happens when one person's "rights" conflict with those of another person? E.g., you believe you have a right to play loud music, and I believe I have a right to sleep. I believe I have a right to maintain my yard just as I please, and you believe you have a right to live in a clean neighborhood where people work to maintain the property values.
- B. Ask students to generate lists of these rights and responsibilities issues that continually arise. Who decides where roads and schools and airports are built, or how tall buildings can be? How do these decisions affect our communities?

Group V

Benchmark:

- A. Explain the important characteristics of U.S. citizenship.

Continually ask yourself the following questions:

- A. "What role does voting play here?"
- B. "How are the important characteristics of U.S. citizenship related to voting?"
- C. "How are 'one person' and 'making a difference' connected to voting?"
- D. "How can you use this information to get more people to vote?"

Teacher Note: Possible discussion topics.

- A. Interview naturalized citizens to determine why they became U.S. citizens.
- B. What are the important characteristics of citizenship from their perspective?
- C. How do they feel about voting?
- D. Identify people who are making a difference in your school or community. Why do they do this?
- E. What do they think about voting?
- F. How would you respond to a person who says, "I'm only one person; my little vote won't really make a difference?"

For Extra Credit:

Subjects other than social studies can be brought into the project. Students could create charts, graphs and percentages to show voting patterns or responses to their questions. E.g., of the 132 people interviewed by our class members, 48 (36%) said they had never registered to vote. Of the 84 who had registered, 50 (60%) had voted in the last general election. Of the 48 who had never registered, 12 were not U. S. citizens so were not eligible to vote. All told, of the 120 people who were eligible to vote, 42% voted in the last general election.